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ABSTRACT

North Carolina State University students were surveyed to assess their political attitudes and preferences prior to the 1976 general election and to compare results with those obtained in a 1972 survey. Information was obtained on: voter registration, party affiliation, political views, candidate preference for president, candidate preference for governor, prediction of election results, reasons for voter preference, the most important issues, and the importance of the election outcome. Among the findings are the following: in comparison to 1972, student interest and participation in the electoral process dropped; students now are politically more conservative than they were in 1972; and students overwhelmingly identified economic issues (taxes, spending, and unemployment) as the most important issues facing the new president. (SW)

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CAMPAIGN 76: A REPORT OF POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND PREFERENCES OF NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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INTRODUCTION

In August 1972 this office conducted a survey to assess political attitudes and preferences of students at North Carolina State University prior to the fall general election. In August of this year another political preference survey, similiar to the one used in 1972, was given to a random sample of 968 undergraduate North Carolina State University students at fall registration. The response rate was 65.9 per cent.

Some highlights of the results of the survey are as follows:

(a) In comparison to 1972, student interest and participation in the electoral process has dropped. Voter registration is 13 per cent less than it was in 1972.

(b) Students now are politically more conservative than they were in 1972. The percentage of students who consider themselves liberal dropped from 34 per cent to 24 per cent, while the percentage of conservatives increased from 17 per cent to 23 per cent.

(c) Student voter preference for Governor was 43 per cent for Hunt, 13.7 per cent for Flaherty, and 31 per cent undecided. In the Presidential race Carter polled 41 per cent; Ford, 32 per cent; and 22 per cent were undecided.

(d) In response to a question about important issues facing the new president, students overwhelmingly identified economic issues (taxes, spending, and unemployment) as the most important issues.

The following pages of the report contain a summary of the major findings of the survey, comparisons with the 1972 survey, and tabular presentation of the results.

Donald H. Solomon
Special Assistant for Student Affairs

SUMMARY OF RESULTS AND COMPARISON WITH 1972 SURVEY RESULTS

1. VOTER REGISTRATION

Approximately 67 per cent of the respondents have registered to vote, 26 per cent indicate that they intend to register, and 7 per cent indicate no intention to register. See Tables 1, 2, and 3. In 1972, 80 per cent of the respondents were registered, 17 per cent intended to register, and only 3 per cent indicated no plans to register. The substantial decrease in the number of students who are registered this year, in comparison to the number registered in 1972, implies that the number of student voters in this election is likely to be less than 1972. The drop in student interest in this election is evidenced not only by the drop in the number of registrants, but is also highlighted by both an increase in the number of students who have no intention of registering and a smaller number of students who responded to this survey. While North Carolina State University student participation is still somewhat higher than the 50 per cent participation predicted for the general population, there is evidence that student votes will be less of a factor in this election than in 1972. The apparent drop in student interest since 1972 can possibly be explained by the fact that 1972 was the first election in which 18-20 year olds were permitted to vote, and immediately prior to the 1972 election there was considerable emphasis on registering this class of new voters. This year there has been very little special emphasis on the 18-20 year old voters. It is not surprising that the survey reveals that 77 per cent of the respondents between the ages of 21-25 are registered, while only 62 per cent of those between 18-20 are registered.

2. PARTY AFFILIATION

Of those students registered to vote, 59 per cent are registered Democrats, 26.8 per cent are Republicans, 9.4 per cent have not designated a party, and 4.8 per cent are independent. See Tables 4, 5, and 6. This represents a slight shift from 1972, when 63.3 per cent of the students were registered Democrats and 25.9 per cent were registered Republicans. The eight Schools did not show any substantial differences from the overall total, except for Physical and Mathematical Sciences where 42.9 per cent of the students were registered Democrats and 37.1 per cent were registered Republicans. These data and the data in paragraph 3 (below) suggest a shift to a more moderate/conservative view on the part of North Carolina State University students.

Because the number of registered Democrats is greater than registered Republicans, in order for the Republicans to win a rational election it is essential that Republican

registrants vote Republican and that a large number of Democrats "cross-over" and vote for a Republican candidate. An interesting statistic revealed by this survey is that each party will apparently attract an equal percentage of cross-over voters. More than 19 per cent of the Republicans indicate an intention to vote for Carter, while 20 per cent of the Democrats intend to vote for Ford. In absolute numbers, it appears that the Republicans will gain some votes; however, the loss of 19 per cent of the Republican vote could seriously hurt the Republican Party and cross-over voters could be a key to the outcome of the election.

3. POLITICAL VIEWS

With respect to classification of political views, 44 per cent of the students classified themselves moderate; 24 per cent, liberal; 22 per cent, conservative; 1 per cent, ultra-liberal; 1 per cent, ultra-conservative; and 8 per cent, no classification. See Tables 7, 8, and 9. This is a marked change in classification in comparison to 1972. In 1972, 34 per cent of the students were liberal; 46.1 per cent, moderate; and 17.4 per cent, conservative. Percentages did not vary substantially from the total by either age, sex, or classification; however, there were noticeable differences between schools. The School of Education students classified themselves as 35.1 per cent liberal, 32.4 per cent moderate, and 27.0 per cent conservative. Physical and Mathematical Sciences was 17.3 per cent liberal, 44 per cent moderate, and 23 per cent conservative. Textiles was 21.7 per cent liberal, 65.2 per cent moderate, and 14.3 per cent conservative. Agricultural Institute was 38.5 per cent liberal, 46.2 per cent moderate, and 7.7 per cent conservative.

4. CANDIDATE PREFERENCE - PRESIDENT

For President of the United States, 40.9 per cent of the registered students plan to vote for Carter, 31.8 per cent plan to vote for Ford, and 21.7 per cent are undecided. In 1972, 63.2 per cent planned to vote for Nixon, 24.8 per cent for McGovern, and 11.4 per cent were undecided. See Tables 10, 11, and 12. The percentage of women students who are undecided is 26.5 per cent, while 19.6 per cent of the men are undecided.

5. CANDIDATE PREFERENCE - GOVERNOR

In the Governor's race, students overwhelmingly favor Jim Hunt. The results were 42.8 per cent for Hunt, and 13.7 per cent for Flaherty, with a large number (30.7%) undecided. Although not shown in the tables, undecided Republicans outnumber undecided Democrats, 36.9 per cent to 27.3 per cent. See Tables 10, 11, and 12.

6. PREDICTION OF ELECTION RESULTS

In making an attempt to predict the outcome of the elections based on the results of this survey, there are a number of issues to consider.

(a) The survey was conducted in late August and the Campaign had not yet gotten into full swing. In fact, there have been some significant shifts in the opinion polls between the time this survey was conducted and the time this report was prepared.

(b) The subjects of this survey are not representative of the general population.

(c) There is a large number of undecided voters in both races, and this group could easily swing the election. The number of undecided students is much larger in this election than it was in 1972.

Despite the factors cited above, it appears that Jim Hunt is likely to win the race for Governor. Flaherty's low support, coupled with a large group of undecided Republicans, points to a strong Hunt victory.

The Presidential race is quite different. President Ford has a strong base of support, shows an ability to attract some Democrat votes, and if he can attract a sizable number of undecided voters, it will be a close race. Ford has, in fact, made a substantial gain between the time this survey was conducted and the time of preparation of this report.

7. REASONS FOR VOTER PREFERENCE

Tables 13 and 14 indicate the reasons students cited for favoring a particular candidate. Analyzing the issue by classification, it appears that Ford's support is based primarily on the perception that he is better qualified than Carter (42.9%). His position on the issues (30.1%), and his past performance (25.0%) followed in importance. Carter is supported, despite the President's repeated claims about Carter's vagueness on the issues, because of his position on the issues (41.9%) and objection to Ford's performance. (Carter better qualified - 24.2% and Ford not doing a good job-21.8%) In addition, 6.9 per cent of the respondents intend to vote for Carter because he is from the South. This is a small percentage of the total, but undoubtedly a large enough number of people to effect the election results in North Carolina and perhaps in most of the Southern States.

8. MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES

Students were asked to identify the most important issues facing the new President. Government spending was the most frequently cited (23.1%), and unemployment (14%), tax reform (13.3%), and confidence in government (13.3%) followed. See Table 15. It is not surprising that domestic issues, particularly economic issues, are of primary importance to students.

9. IMPORTANCE OF THE ELECTION OUTCOME

Tables 16 and 17 show student response to a question about the importance of the election outcome. Eighty-eight percent indicate that the outcome is either important or very important to them. However as noted earlier, 35 percent of the students did not respond to the survey; and it is likely that a substantial number of those who failed to respond are not particularly concerned about the election outcome.

TABLE 1

VOTER REGISTRATION, BY CLASSIFICATION

Are you registered to vote?	New Freshmen (N=134)	Other Undergraduates (N=492)	Total (N=626)
Yes	58.2	69.3	66.9
No	41.8	30.7	33.1
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 2

VOTER REGISTRATION, BY AGE

	Less than 18 (N=19)	18-20 (N=358)	21-25 (N=209)	26 or older (N=34)	Total (N=620)
Yes	15.8	62.6	76.6	73.5	66.5
No	84.2	37.4	23.4	26.5	33.5
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 3

VOTER REGISTRATION, BY SCHOOL

	ACLS (N=138)	DESIGN (N=15)	EDUC. (N=37)	ENGR. (N=179)	F. RES. (N=42)	L. ARTS (N=129)	PAMS (N=52)	TEXT. (N=23)	AGI (N=13)	TOTAL (N=628)
Yes	63.0	60.0	75.7	66.5	64.3	70.5	65.4	73.9	61.5	66.9
No	37.0	40.0	24.3	33.5	35.7	29.5	34.6	26.1	38.5	33.1
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 4

PARTY AFFILIATION OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE REGISTERED, BY CLASSIFICATION

	New Freshmen (N=78)	Other Undergraduates (N=354)	Total (N=432)
Democratic	65.4	57.6	59.0
Republican	26.9	26.6	26.6
No Party	5.1	10.4	9.5
Independent	2.6	5.4	4.9
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 5

PARTY AFFILIATION OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE REGISTERED, BY AGE

	Less than 18 (N=3)	18-20 (N=227)	21-25 (N=170)	26 or older (N=25)	Total (N=425)
Democratic	66.7	61.7	54.7	68.0	59.3
Republican	33.3	26.0	27.1	24.0	26.4
No Party	00.0	8.8	11.2	4.0	9.4
Independent	00.0	3.5	7.0	4.0	4.9
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 6

PARTY AFFILIATION OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE REGISTERED, BY SCHOOL

	AGLS (N=90)	DESIGN (N=10)	EDUC. (N=29)	ENGR. (N=123)	F. RES. (N=28)	LIB. ARTS (N=93)	PAMS (N=35)	TEXT. (N=17)	AGI (N=8)	TOTAL (N=433)
Democratic	63.3	80.0	69.0	56.9	42.9	63.4	42.9	64.7	62.5	59.4
Republican	20.0	10.0	27.6	31.8	25.0	24.7	37.1	29.4	25.0	26.8
No Party	10.0	10.0	00.0	8.9	28.6	7.5	5.7	5.9	00.0	9.0
Independent	6.7	00.0	3.4	2.4	3.5	4.4	14.3	00.0	12.5	4.8
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

POLITICAL VIEWS, BY CLASSIFICATION

	New Freshmen (N=133)	Other Undergraduates (N=485)	Total (N=618)
Ultra-liberal	0.7	1.2	1.1
Liberal	24.8	23.5	23.8
Middle-of-the-road	44.4	43.7	43.9
Conservative	21.1	22.7	22.3
Ultra-conservative	1.5	0.4	0.6
No classification	7.5	8.5	8.3
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 8

POLITICAL VIEWS, BY AGE

	Less than 18 (N=19)	18-20 (N=355)	21-25 (N=205)	26 or older (N=33)	Total (N=612)
Ultra-liberal	5.3	0.8	1.5	00.0	1.1
Liberal	15.8	23.7	21.5	36.4	23.4
Middle-of-the-road	42.1	46.2	42.9	36.4	44.4
Conservative	31.6	22.0	22.9	18.2	22.4
Ultra-conservative	00.0	0.6	1.0	00.0	0.7
No classification	5.2	6.7	10.2	9.0	8.0
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 9

POLITICAL VIEWS, BY SCHOOL

	AGLS (N=137)	DESIGN (N=13)	EDUC. (N=37)	ENGR. (N=177)	F. RES. (N=42)	L. ARTS. (N=129)	PAMS (N=52)	TEXT. (N=23)	AGI. (N=13)	TOTAL (N=623)
Ultra-liberal	00.0	00.0	00.0	0.6	2.4	2.3	3.8	00.0	00.0	1.1
Liberal	27.7	7.7	35.1	21.5	23.8	21.7	17.3	21.7	38.5	23.6
Middle-of-the-road	42.3	30.8	32.4	43.5	42.9	46.5	44.2	65.2	46.2	43.8
Conservative	20.4	30.8	27.0	25.4	26.2	21.7	23.1	4.3	7.7	22.5
Ultra-conservative	00.0	00.0	00.0	2.3	00.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	00.0	0.6
No classification	9.5	30.8	5.4	6.8	4.8	7.8	11.5	8.7	7.7	8.3
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 10

CANDIDATE PREFERENCE, BY CLASSIFICATION

	New Freshmen (N=125)	Other Undergraduates (N=460)	Total (N=585)
PRESIDENT			
Carter	44.8	39.8	40.9
Ford	31.2	32.2	32.0
Other	0.8	2.4	2.0
Not certain	20.0	22.0	21.5
Do not plan to vote	3.2	3.7	3.6
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0
GOVERNOR	(N=117)	(N=428)	(N=545)
Hunt	44.4	42.3	42.8
Flaherty	13.7	13.8	13.8
Other	.9	5.1	4.2
Not certain	35.0	29.5	30.6
Do not plan to vote	6.0	9.3	8.6
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 11

CANDIDATE PREFERENCE, BY AGE

	Less than 18 (N=15)	18-20 (N=338)	21-25 (N=196)	26 or older (N=30)	Total (N=579)
PRESIDENT					
Carter	33.3	40.5	39.3	50.0	40.4
Ford	46.7	30.8	36.2	20.0	32.5
Other	6.7	1.5	3.1	00.0	2.1
Not certain	6.7	23.7	18.4	26.7	21.6
Do not plan to vote	6.6	3.5	3.0	3.3	3.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
GOVERNOR	(N=13)	(N=318)	(N=181)	(N=28)	(N=540)
Hunt	30.8	44.7	42.0	39.3	43.2
Flaherty	15.4	13.8	14.4	10.7	13.9
Other	7.7	3.8	5.5	3.6	4.4
Not certain	23.1	29.2	30.9	35.7	30.0
Do not plan to vote	23.0	8.5	7.2	10.7	8.5
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TOTAL 12

CANDIDATE PREFERENCE, BY SCHOOL

	AGLS (N=131)	DESIGN (N=13)	EDUC. (N=32)	ENGR. (N=167)	F. RES. (N=39)	L. ARTS (N=125)	PAMS (N=48)	TEXT. (N=20)	AGI. (N=13)	TOTAL (N=588)
PRESIDENT										
Carter	49.6	61.5	40.6	39.5	28.2	38.4	33.3	25.0	69.2	41.0
Ford	22.9	15.4	31.3	35.3	35.9	36.0	39.6	35.0	15.4	32.0
Other	2.3	00.0	3.1	0.6	2.6	1.6	4.2	00.0	7.7	1.9
Not certain	19.8	15.4	25.0	21.6	30.8	20.8	18.7	40.0	7.7	21.7
Do not plan to vote	5.4	7.7	00.0	3.0	2.5	3.2	4.2	00.0	00.0	3.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
GOVERNOR	(N=120)	(N=12)	(N=31)	(N=159)	(N=37)	(N=113)	(N=45)	(N=19)	(N=12)	(N=548)
Hunt	49.2	41.7	58.1	39.6	27.0	46.9	35.6	42.1	33.3	43.1
Flaherty	12.5	16.7	9.7	15.7	10.8	15.0	11.1	21.0	00.0	13.7
Other	4.2	00.0	3.2	3.8	2.7	4.4	2.2	5.3	25.0	4.2
Not certain	25.0	16.6	25.8	32.7	45.9	28.3	37.8	31.6	33.3	30.6
Do not plan to vote	9.1	25.0	3.2	8.2	13.6	5.4	13.3	00.0	8.4	8.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

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TABLE 13

PRIMARY REASON, BY CLASSIFICATION

	New Freshmen (N=60)	Other Undergraduates (N=188)	Total (N=248)
CARTER			
He is a Democrat	5.0	5.3	5.2
His position on the issues	48.3	39.9	41.9
He is from the South	8.3	6.4	6.9
Mr. Ford has not done a good job	18.4	22.9	21.8
He is better qualified than Ford	20.0	25.5	24.8
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0
FORD	(N=43)	(N=153)	(N=196)
He is a Republican	00.0	0.6	0.5
His position on the issues	25.6	31.4	30.1
He is the incumbent	00.0	2.0	1.5
He has done a fine job	30.2	23.5	25.0
He is better qualified than Carter	44.2	42.5	42.9
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 14

PRIMARY REASON, BY AGE

	Less than 18 (N=6)	18-20 (N=143)	21-25 (N=80)	26 or older (N=15)	Total (N=244)
CARTER					
He is a Democrat	00.0	7.0	3.8	00.0	5.3
His position on the issues	50.0	41.3	47.5	26.7	42.6
He is from the South	16.7	9.0	5.0	00.0	7.4
Mr. Ford has not done a good job	16.7	21.0	15.0	53.3	20.9
He is better qualified than Ford	16.6	21.7	28.7	20.0	23.8
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
FORD	(N=7)	(N=113)	(N=70)	(N=6)	(N=196)
He is a Republican	00.0	00.0	1.4	00.0	0.5
His position on the issues	42.9	22.1	38.6	50.0	29.6
He is the incumbent	00.0	2.7	00.0	00.0	1.5
He has done a fine job	28.6	27.4	21.4	00.0	24.5
He is better qualified than Carter	28.5	47.8	38.6	50.0	43.9
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 15

IMPORTANT ISSUES THAT WILL FACE THE NEW PRESIDENT

Most Important	Total (N=594)
1. Government spending	23.1
2. Unemployment	14.0
3. Tax reform	13.3
4. Confidence in government	13.3

TABLE 16

IMPORTANCE OF ELECTION OUTCOME, BY CLASSIFICATION

	New Freshmen (N=129)	Other Undergraduates (N=471)	Total (N=600)
Very important	30.2	38.9	37.0
Important	63.6	47.6	51.0
Of little importance	4.7	11.0	9.7
Of no importance	1.5	2.5	2.3
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

TABLE 17

IMPORTANCE OF ELECTION OUTCOME, BY AGE

	Less than 18 (N=19)	18-20 (N=344)	21-25 (N=200)	26 or older (N=33)	Total (N=596)
Very Important	31.6	34.3	39.5	57.6	37.2
Important	63.2	53.2	50.5	21.2	50.8
Of little importance	00.0	10.2	8.0	18.2	9.6
Of no importance	5.2	2.3	2.0	3.0	2.4
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

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